

KENTUCKY DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Family and Community Engagement

Three-hour training for experienced school-based decision making membership

Objectives:

- *The Missing Piece of the Proficiency Puzzle*
- Barriers to Parent and Community Engagement
- Is Your School Friendly
- Family Engagement Policies
- Family/Community Engagement Next Steps

Session Overview:

Connections between schools and the resources that exist in a community to improve student achievement can support a shared responsibility between the schools, the families and community. Effectively involving family and community resources is essential to school success. According to the National Parental Information and Resource Center, "Research over the past 30 years has shown that engaging families in their children's education increases student achievement and decreases dropout rates. Effective family engagement is not a one-time program or the choice of a good school, but rather a set of day-to-day practices, attitudes, beliefs and interactions that support learning at home, at school, afterschool and during the summer. To ensure that the students of today are ready for the careers of tomorrow, families, schools, and community groups need to work together to promote engagement that is systemic, sustained, and integrated into school improvement efforts." (www.nationalpirc.org)

Student Achievement:

The school council's mission is to improve student achievement. Each school council must create an environment in their own schools that will result in students achieving at high levels. All policies and decisions by the school council must contribute to achievement of the overall school mission.

These SBDM training materials were developed by the Kentucky Department of Education for use in training new school council members in implementing school-based decision making.



What is the difference between engagement and involvement?

Circle the correct answer for each definition.

1. A collaborative partnership between the parents and school is:
 - a. Engagement
 - b. Involvement
2. “Doing To” refers to:
 - a. Engagement
 - b. Involvement
3. Participation of parents in regular, two-way and meaningful communication is:
 - a. Engagement
 - b. Involvement
4. “Doing With” refers to:
 - a. Engagement
 - b. Involvement
5. Doing what educators ask or expect parents to do is:
 - a. Engagement
 - b. Involvement
6. Which one produces better results?
 - a. Engagement
 - b. Involvement
7. A partnership with parents in which they bring their own knowledge into schools is:
 - a. Engagement
 - b. Involvement

The Missing Piece of the Proficiency Puzzle

Kentucky’s definition of parent or family consists of a natural, adoptive or foster parent; other adult serving as a parent, such as a close relative; legal or educational guardian; and/or a community or agency advocate. The definition of parent, as it relates to the parent representative on the school council, based on KRS 160.345(1)(d) as a parent, stepparent or foster parent of a student or a person who has legal custody of a student pursuant to a court order and with whom the student resides.

From the beginning of the Commissioner’s Parent Advisory Council (CPAC), under Commissioner Wilmer Cody in 1999, the group’s purpose has been to advise the Kentucky Department of Education (KDE) on policy issues and to increase parent leadership for improving public education. CPAC has over 30 parent members from across the state, selected at the discretion of the commissioner. On March 30, 2006, then-Commissioner Gene Wilhoit gave CPAC members this instruction: “My goal is outstanding practice to involve parents in every school in Kentucky. Your charge is to pull together an agenda for the state and produce a document that builds on what exists and pushes us to a higher level.”

Building on our state's long experience with reform, CPAC strongly recommended that Kentucky become the first state in the nation to set a standard for family and community involvement that is focused on improving student achievement. This standard includes six objectives designed to involve families and the community to improve student achievement. For school council members, this document can provide a framework as you strive to increase parent, family and community involvement in your school.

To answer Commission Wilhoit's charge, CPAC developed the document *The Missing Piece of the Proficiency Puzzle*. Within the document, CPAC proposes specific school-level descriptors. These descriptors include provisions that every student in Kentucky will have a parent, or another adult, who knows how to support that student's academic achievement. The objectives are as follows:

- **Relationship-building:** The school staff builds productive, personal relationships with parents of all students.
- **Communications:** Two-way information in many forms flows regularly between school staff and parents about students' academic achievement and individual needs.
- **Decision-making:** School staff encourages, supports and expects parents to be involved in school improvement decisions and to monitor and assist school improvement.
- **Advocacy:** For each student, the school staff identifies and supports a parent or other adult who can take personal responsibility for understanding and speaking for that child's learning needs.
- **Learning Opportunities:** The school staff ensures that families have multiple opportunities to understand how to support their children's learning.
- **Community Partnerships:** The school staff engages and partners with community members to plan and implement substantive work to improve student achievement.

Building on these objectives and findings, CPAC members recommended that Kentucky become the first state to adopt comprehensive school performance descriptors for family and community involvement focused on improving student achievement. The appendix of *The Missing Piece of the Proficiency Puzzle* contains these descriptors.

The second objective is Communication. Look at the descriptors for proficient. What actions do you see? How can this relate to school council work?

Proficient	School Council Role
School staff implements systematic efforts to inform parents about academic goals, class work, grades and homework for their children in their home language.	
School staff offers varied ways that parents can share information with teachers about their children's learning needs.	
School staff partners with community leaders and organizations to build parent understanding of academic expectations, school strategies and student achievement results.	

School staff offers parents opportunities to discuss school-wide achievement issues, including assessment data, at least once a semester.	
School staff implements systematic efforts to maximize parent-teacher conference participation.	
At least 50 percent of parents respond to annual school and/or district stakeholder surveys.	
Stakeholder survey data is consistently used to plan school improvement efforts and to evaluate their effectiveness.	



Reflection:



How can our school council include ideas and opinions from the school's stakeholders?



Barriers to Family and Community Engagement

Before we can begin planning steps to engage parents, families and the community in the school, we need to explore the reasons that parents, families and/or the community do not participate in the educational programs in a school.

As a table/group, look at the chart below of road blocks for parent, family or community involvement. What are some detours that schools and school councils can take to address and knock down the roadblocks?

	 Roadblock	 Detour
Time	<p>Parents often cite time as the greatest barrier to volunteering, attending meetings and joining decision-making committees at their child's school.</p> <p>These activities often are scheduled at times that interfere with work or other obligations.</p>	

	 Roadblock	 Detour
Not Valued	<p>Some parents are not sure they have anything of value to contribute.</p> <p>Parents may feel intimidated by principals, teachers and other leaders, including school council representatives.</p> <p>These parents may have had an unpleasant school experience or may have limited education or low literacy levels.</p> <p>Parents whose experience with the law has been negative also may be reluctant or embarrassed to participate in some school or programs that now require fingerprints for regular volunteers.</p> <p>Educators and administrators can reinforce these feelings if they consider uninvolved parents lacking in certain qualities or deficient in some ways.</p>	
Unwelcomed Feeling	<p>Parents may feel they are unwelcome in the school.</p> <p>Staff interactions, attitudes and the physical appearance of some schools may convey an unwelcoming environment.</p>	
Not Understanding School System	<p>Some parents believe they have talents but don't know whether they are needed or how to contribute them to the school.</p> <p>Many parents are unfamiliar with the system and therefore do not know what their rights are or how they can become involved.</p>	
Family in Need	<p>Parents without adequate resources often feel overwhelmed.</p> <p>Families suffering from economic stress must address their own needs for food, clothing and shelter before they can become more involved in their children's education.</p>	
Childcare	<p>Childcare may not be offered at meetings or school functions.</p> <p>At times, parents may be discouraged from bringing their children to events.</p>	
Language	<p>Parents who don't speak English may not understand newsletters, fliers or speakers at meetings.</p>	

	 Roadblock	 Detour
Parents with Special Needs	Parents with disabilities may find it difficult or feel uncomfortable attending and contributing at meetings.	
Transportation	Lack of transportation or access to parking at the school keeps parents from visiting or attending school activities.	

Reflection:

What are the barriers for family and community engagement at your school? How can you address these as a school council member?

Is Your School Friendly?

Studies of effective schools find that the tone the school takes from the moment someone enters the parking lot sets that tone for the rest of the school. When schools welcome parents, families and the community and establish those relationships early by encouraging collaboration, students do better in school and schools improve.

The following checklist on the next page was developed by the Center on Parent Leadership to determine if your school is welcoming.

Family Friendly School Checklist

Use the following scale to mark each statement.

Already doing this: 4	This would take some time: 2
Could do this easily: 3	This would be really hard: 1

Welcoming Environment

_____	Friendly signs inside and out welcome families and visitors and explain how to get around the building. Extra Credit: A parent help desk is just inside the main entrance.
_____	The school has standards of welcoming behavior that apply to all staff, including bus drivers, security guards, custodians and cafeteria workers.
_____	Front office staff is friendly – recognize visitors right away, provide information easily and answer the

	phone in a way that makes callers glad they have called.
_____	A comfortable family resource room where parents can meet is stocked with books, games and educational information that families can borrow.

Total Score _____ (Add one point if the extra credit applies)

Programs and Activities to Engage Families in Improving Student Achievement

	Current student work is displayed throughout the building. Exhibits clearly explain the purpose of the work and the high standards the work should reflect.
	All programs and activities for families focus on student achievement – they help families understand what their children are learning and promote high standards.
	Special workshops, learning kits and other activities show families how to help their children at home – and respond to what families say they want to know about.
	The school reports to parents about student progress and how teachers, parents and community members can work together to make improvements.

Total Score _____

Strong Relationships Between Teachers and Families

	A “joining process” welcomes families to the school, offers tours and introduces them to staff and other families. Extra Credit: Bilingual speakers are available to help families.
	Frequent opportunities for teachers and families to meet face-to-face and get to know each other – class meetings, breakfasts, home visits, class observations – are provided.
	Teachers or advisors make personal contact with each family at least once a month.
	A family liaison helps teachers connect to families and bridge barriers of language and culture.

Total Score _____ (Add one point if the extra credit applies)

Developing Families’ Self-Confidence and Power

	Families are involved in planning how they would like to be involved at the school.
	School committees and the PTA/PTO reflect the diversity of the school community and actively recruit and welcome families from all backgrounds.
	The school is open and accessible – it is easy for parents to meet with the principal, talk to teachers and counselors, and bring up issues and concerns.
	Parents develop school improvement projects and do action research – survey other families, observe in classrooms, review materials and visit other schools and programs.

Total Score _____

Professional Development for Families and Staff

	Families learn how the school system works and how to be an effective advocate for their child. Extra Credit: Each student has a student support team that includes parent(s).
	Teachers learn about effective approaches to working with families of diverse cultural backgrounds.
	Families and staff have opportunities to learn together how to collaborate to improve student achievement.
	The school reaches out to identify and draw in local community resources that can assist staff and families.

Total Score _____ (Add one point if the extra credit applies)

Total Score for Entire Checklist: _____

Scoring Guide

A	70-80	You're a Family Friendly School!
B	60-69	With a little more work, you'll be there.
C	50-59	Focus on the easiest areas, and then tackle the harder ones.
D	40-49	You may need outside help. Pull together an action team.

Reflection:

Look back at the checklist and the action words from the Communication section of *The Missing Piece of the Proficiency Puzzle*.

Which areas are you doing well with?

Which ones will need more work?

What can the school council do to make the school more welcoming?

What are your major concerns right now?

Family Engagement Policies

Research shows that when schools work together with families to support learning, children are inclined to succeed not just in school but also throughout life. Participation of families is critical throughout a child's entire academic career.

Kentucky believes that in order to ensure effective family involvement for building capacity the school should:

- Assist parents in understanding Kentucky's assessment and their child's performance
- Provide training and materials to help parents work with their children to improve their achievement
- Implement and coordinate parent programs
- Inform parents about school activities and meetings in a language they can understand
- Offer meetings at a variety of times and places to encourage parent involvement

School councils may wish to include some of the following activities as part of a school's family engagement plan:

- Establish a volunteer program for parents and community members that gives volunteers specific and meaningful tasks.
- Ask for volunteers with specific interests, hobbies or jobs that they would be willing to share with students as a classroom resource.

- Involve civic clubs, businesses and community organizations in school projects. Ask for their help and resources for specific school events (e.g., career days, science fairs).
- Ask local businesses to set up simulations with groups of students to simulate real-life learning experiences.

Informing Families and the Community

School councils must work on ways to spread information to the school community. Some ideas for school councils to use include:

- Create an annual school directory to communicate about your school, its programs, staff, special features, school council members and the school's objectives for the upcoming year.
- Cover school council and school activities in a newsletter published at regular intervals during throughout the year.
- Ask teachers and parents to volunteer to make presentations to the board of education, family groups, civic groups and others about good things that are happening at the school.
- Post the minutes of school council meetings in a prominent place in the school, and distribute them widely.
- Communicate with high school families through the high school's student newspaper. The school council's student representative could write articles about what the school council is doing, or a regular reporter could cover school council meetings.
- Set up a school council booth at back-to-school nights or events, school open houses and family orientation sessions. Let families know they can serve as a school council member or on a school council committee.

Examine Alphabet Elementary School's Parent Involvement policy on the next page. Note the strengths, the loopholes, the limitations and how the policy could be strengthened.

Parent Involvement

[Federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA); Title I, Part A (Section 1118) as amended for No Child Left Behind (2001)]

A Parent Involvement Policy is not a required policy area for all schools. However, if the school receives Federal Title I, Part A, funds, the school council must have a policy.

Purpose: The Parent Involvement Policy of Alphabet Elementary School ensures equitable participation in the planning, reviewing and implementing of all parent programs and activities.

Procedures:

Alphabet Elementary School, along with the district Federal Programs Coordinator, shall convene an annual meeting, at a time that is convenient for parents, to which all parents are invited and encouraged to attend. At this meeting, parents will be informed of the school's participation in a Title I schoolwide program, the purpose and requirements of Title I, and their right to be involved. Particular attention shall be given to reaching those parents who are economically disadvantaged, are disabled, have limited English proficiency, have limited literacy, or are of any racial or ethnic minority background.

Alphabet Elementary School shall involve parents in an organized, ongoing, and timely manner, in the Title I planning, review, and improvement of programs, including the joint development of the school parent involvement policy.

Parent involvement is best defined as any time a parent commits to assisting their child in learning and achieving academically to a higher level with greater interest and motivation. Parent involvement can be accomplished in a variety of ways.

- Reading together at home with your child.
- Developing your expectations for your child and communicating these expectations to your child; communicating your support in helping your child achieve these expectations.
- Communicating positive values such as respect, hard work and responsibility.
- Providing your child with positive encouragement when they achieve certain goals.
- Speaking with your child's teacher on a regular basis and offering any assistance that the teacher may suggest.
- Becoming involved in the school's PTO/SBDM council and/or committees.
- Discussing your child's assessment scores after receiving the scores and an explanation of them by mail from the school.

Any parent wishing to serve as a parent volunteer in the school must complete a criminal background check and attend confidentiality training.

Shared Responsibility for Parent Involvement and High Student Achievement: Alphabet Elementary School has jointly developed with parents, for all students, a parent-school learning compact that describes the responsibilities of parents, students, teachers and the principal in ensuring that children are successful in school and in meeting the state's academic expectations. This compact shall be reviewed annually prior to the first instructional day.

Concerns: Any comments or concerns regarding the parent involvement policy or compact shall be submitted to the Alphabet School District's Federal Programs Coordinator, Ms. Susan Smith. She can be reached at 502-555-5555.

Evaluation: Annually, parent data (e.g., surveys, attendance at programs and conferences, volunteer listings) shall be analyzed during the improvement planning process.

What are the strengths?

What are loopholes?
What are the limitations?
How can the policy be strengthened?

Next Steps

Now that we have looked at barriers, relationship building and the requirements of Title I, what are the next steps that your school council can do to encourage more parent, family and community engagement in the school?

The chart on the following page allows you to begin thinking about your Next Steps. The educator portion has been completed. How can the school council involve its families and community leaders in the school? How can all these groups partner together in increase student achievement?

Reflection:

As you finish the course today, think about ideas that have been “Ah-Ha” moments or even “Oh-Wow” moments. What will you take back to your school council?

